

Lighter Side of Life and Politics in Tamil Nadu

Thanjai Nalankilli

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edited by
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Preface

We have published over two-dozen books. This book is different from others. It looks into the lighter side of life and politics in Tamil Nadu, mostly from a humorist and satirical view. The book is also smaller.

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1.

Chennai and Madras: What is in a Name?

Inia Pandian

[First Published: November 1997]

On July 17, 1996, M. Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, announced in the state assembly that the state capital Madras would henceforth be officially known by the name Chennai in all languages. Though the name Chennai has been used widely in both colloquial and written Tamil even before, the name Madras was used in English and other languages until then. What is the story behind the names Chennai and Madras?

The British acquired this area over three and a half centuries ago. It was a small coastal village at that time - a far cry from the sprawling metropolis of today. Venkatappa Naik (also known as Naik Venkatadiri) granted the area now occupying the St. George Fort to a British agent named Francis Day for free in August 1639. All that he wanted was that the British found a town there in the name of his father Chennappa Naik. So the British named the new town Chennapattnam ("Pattnam" or "pattinam" means "town" in Tamil). "Chennapattnam" changed to "Chennai" over a period of time.

What about the name Madras? There is more than one story about this.

I heard a very interesting explanation from a South African Tamil gentleman several years ago. (Yes, there are many Tamils living in South Africa for centuries. Many of you may know that Mahatma Gandhi toned his methods of nonviolent protest against injustice first in South Africa before he used it in India against the British rule. But, do you know that a South African Tamil lady named Valliammai was one of his top associates there? She worked with him well before Nehru, Patel and others.) This South African Tamil gentleman told me this explanation for the name Madras. The British agent Francis Day agreed to name the town Chennapattnam as Venkatappa Naik requested, and did call it so in Tamil. But there was an inside joke among the British. They thought that Venkatappa Naik was mad (stupid) giving away the land for free just to be named after his father. So they called the town in English "Mad Rasa Pattnam". ("Rasa" means king in Tamil.) In fact, it is called Medrassapatam in the 1639 deed of sale. It would seem that Medrassapatam is the British way of spelling Madrasapattinam (in the same way as they spelled Alwarpettai as Alwarpet, and Thirunelveli as Tinnelveli).

According to another explanation, the land was given to Francis Day by a man named Madarasen, head of a fishermen's slum, and the town was named after him. This explanation, however, has a hole in it. The 1639 deed of sale clearly states that Venkatappa Naik gave the land to Francis Day. Some conjecture that Medrassapatam and Chennapattnam were nearby areas and that Francis Day acquired the former first from Madarasen and the latter then from Venkatappa Naik; the name Medrassapatam was mentioned in the deed of sales as a reference point. Another point to note is that Madras was widely used in English (among the British at that time and then by everyone who

learned the language) and Chennai was used in Tamil. This seems to buttress the South African Tamil gentleman's explanation. Whatever the origins of the names, Madras is now for the history books and Chennai is here to stay.

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2.

Sadu Kudu and Kabadi: What is in a Name?

K. Pitchai

[First Published: April 2005]

PMK - Pattali Makkal Katchi (also spelled as, Paattali Makkal Katchi); a political party in Tamil Nadu.

Thina Thanthi - A Tamil newspaper. It has the largest circulation in Tamil Nadu.

"Sadu kudu" is a game played in Tamilnadu for ages. (The game is played under other names in other regions of South Asia.) As late as five decades ago, it was immensely popular in rural areas of some parts of Tamil Nadu. Unlike many other games, it does not require balls or bats or nets or other types of equipment to play. So even poor people can play the game. It was played in the open spaces of villages in the evenings and in school playgrounds during school recesses. Sadu kudu is played mostly by boys and young men, and seldom, if ever, by females.

The game sadu-kudu is played by two teams of equal numbers of players. Two adjoining rectangle are marked on the ground (in sandy areas the two rectangles are drawn using feet or hands). Each team stands in one rectangle facing the other. One player from Team-A goes into the other team's rectangle saying continuously "sadu kudu, sadu kudu, sadu kudu" or saying a song (more like a rhyming rap song) interspersed with the words "sadu kudu" at the end of each sentence or stanza. The song is one he had heard elsewhere or something he made up. It could be folklore or just a boast about him. This player would try to touch as many players of the other team (Team-B) as possible. If he returns to his rectangle without interrupting his saying sadu kudu or the song, all those whom he touched within the other rectangle are eliminated. When the player is in their rectangle, Team-B players would try to get hold of him and keep him in their rectangle until he interrupts his song or sadu kudu saying. If they succeed, he was eliminated from the game. Of course, if he get out of their hold and returns to his rectangle without interrupting his song, all those Team-B players who touched him would be eliminated. Then a player from Team-B goes into Team-A rectangle. This is repeated until all players of a team are eliminated.

The game was played under its age-old Tamil name "sadu kudu" until the 1950s. Then, some physical education teachers started calling the game "kabadi". This name is from the north; this writer is unable to find out the language or what it means. Quite possibly it is just a meaningless utterance like "sadu kudu". Tamil people have this habit of thinking that anything that comes from outside is superior and using it; for example using Sanskrit and English words instead of Tamil words. Under this same attitude, the outside name "kabadi" has almost replaced the age-old Tamil name "sadu kudu".

Though the physical aspects of the game did not change with the name change, an important aspect of the game, namely the singing (saying) of the song is eliminated. Now the player merely repeated the word "kabadi"; the songs that most players sang along with repeating "sadu kudu" are eliminated. The sadu kudu game is not merely a good physical exercise; it also developed vocal skill (saying or singing a song) and imagination (if one made up a song or modified a song which many did). The game exercised the brain and encouraged some level of imagination and creativity. In fact, just listening to skilled players is as much a pleasure as watching a good game.

Recently a news item in the Tamil newspaper Thina Thanthi said that Thina Thanthi publisher Dr. Sivanthi Athiththan organizes "Kabadi Teams" in many districts of Tamil Nadu so that the age-old game would not become extinct. We are very happy to hear that. However we request that they call the game by the Tamil name "sadu kudu" and also play it the way it was played in Tamil Nadu for centuries. I am sure that it is an oversight on the part of Dr. Sivanthi Athiththan and he would make the necessary changes.

We also learned that Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), a political party in Tamil Nadu, would conduct games and tournaments for a week during the Pongal festival, and would popularize classic Tamil games. PMK is a Tamil-oriented party and is doing much for Tamil language and Tamil culture in recent years. We hope that PMK would call the game sadu-kudu instead of kabadi.

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Devaneyya Pavanar's Tamil book "Thamizh Naddu Vilaiyaaddukkal" describes many classic Tamil games including sadu kudu [Reference 1]. It seems that the book is out of print. Interested readers may look for it at libraries.

(SUMMARY: Sadu-kudu is a game played in Tamil Nadu for millennia. We should not change its name to kabadi but retain the original Tamil name.)

REFERENCE

1. G. Deveneyan, "Thamiz Naddu Vilaiyaaddukkal (in Tamil)", Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tamil Nadu, 1962.

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3.

Dr. Chief Minister!

(Political Humour and Satire)

Inia Pandian

[First Published: May 1998; Updated: August 2019]

ABBREVIATIONS

AIADMK - All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

DMK - Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)

I have a modest proposal to the government and people of Tamil Nadu. Next time a new Chief Minister is elected, let the governor hand over a honorary doctorate degree to him/her during the swear-in ceremony. This will save the taxpayers some money. After all, every Tamil Nadu Chief minister since Karunanidhi has received an honorary doctorate degree from a Tamil Nadu university! Why wait for a few months and have a separate ceremony and the associated expenses when you may as well hand over the new chief minister an honorary doctorate at the swear-in ceremony itself?

It all started with Karunanidhi. He became chief minister in 1969 following the untimely death of C. N. Annadurai. DMK's top hierarchy was loaded with leaders holding Master of Arts (M.A.) degrees. The list included C. N. Annadurai, Nedunchezian, Anbalagan, Nanjil Manoharan, and so on. But Karunanidhi had very little formal education. He dropped out of school to participate in one of the earliest anti-Hindi agitation some 50 years ago. So he does not even have a high school certificate. This is in no way a reflection on his intelligence. He is a very intelligent man with many books and movie screen plays to his credit. In any case, he did not even have a high school certificate while many of his colleagues held Master's degrees. It would seem that some of his friends in the party thought that it would be nice if a university give him an honorary doctorate degree. Senate of the University of Madras was more than willing to accommodate their wishes; after all the university depends on the Tamil Nadu government for the bulk of its budget. To our knowledge, Karunanidhi is the first Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to receive an honorary doctorate from a Tamil Nadu university.

After Karunanidhi's first stint as chief minister, M. G. Ramachandran of AIADMK became the chief minister. He did not have a high school certificate either. He dropped out of school because of poverty and joined an acting company that toured Tamil Nadu with their dramas. His family was so poor that his mother, unable to buy rice for dinner, would often give him and his elder brother some peanuts for dinner. He and his brother M. G. Sarangapani toured with the acting company for many years. Later, as the movie industry picked up steam, Sarangapani became a well-known character actor while Ramachandran became one of the most popular matinee idols Tamil Nadu had seen.

Any way, M. G. Ramachandran did not have much formal education either. When he became chief minister, his supporters saw to it that a Tamil Nadu university gave him an honorary doctorate degree as well. Unlike the case of Karunanidhi, it was not a quiet affair of receiving the degree at the convocation. The Tamil film industry, which was proud of one of its very own ascending to the helms of power, made it a gala occasion with processions and celebrations.

The next one to become Tamil Nadu Chief Minister was Jayalaltha Jayaram. She did complete high school but did not go to college because of a very lucrative movie offer to star in the Tamil film "Vennira Adai". (Her mother was a movie actress too.) It was no surprise that Jayalalitha was given an honorary doctorate by a Tamil Nadu university. One known for extravagantly gala celebrations, the occasion of Jayalalithaa receiving the honorary degree was marked by celebrations eclipsing the M. G. Ramachandran celebrations on similar occasion.

In summary, it has now become an established tradition in Tamil Nadu that every chief minister should receive an honorary doctorate. So my proposal that may save some money for the Tamil Nadu treasury is that the governor hand over an honorary doctorate degree to every new chief minister on the occasion of the swear-in ceremony.

I want to emphasize that although these three chief ministers did not have college education because of family and personal reasons, they were intelligent and effective politicians and administrators. There was yet another Tamil Nadu (Madras State) Chief Minister with no college education. K. Kamaraj (Chief Minister from 1954-1963) dropped out of school in order to support his widowed mother and sister. As Chief Minister, he started numerous primary and high schools in rural areas. He established free education and midday meals to poor students. The man who could not complete school because of poverty was responsible for hundreds of thousands of poor youngsters getting an education. He is sometimes called "kalvi vallal" (education benefactor) and also "padikkaatha methai" (genius without [formal] education).

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4.

A Strange Disease In Tamil Nadu

(Political Humour and Satire)

Inia Pandian

[First Published: September 1997; Updated: July 2002]

[I am not implying that the people named in the article were not sick. Their doctors have said they were sick, and I am not a doctor to diagnose them from afar or near.]

OUTLINE

Abbreviations

1. Introduction
2. Adhi Rajaram
3. T.T.V. Bhaskaran
4. Sasikala Natarajan

Abbreviations

AIADMK - All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

CBI - Central Bureau of Investigation

1. Introduction

A strange disease is going around in Tamil Nadu. This disease seems to be restricted to the capital city Chennai (Madras). It seems to strike suddenly and unexpectedly. In most cases it did not have any symptoms detectable in blood chemistry, X-rays or other diagnostic tools. This disease is not widespread. Only a handful of people have been struck in the past three or four years. The disease is not fatal but very expensive, requiring long hospital stays. Fortunately, this expensive disease strikes only the very rich, especially those with political connections at the highest levels. Furthermore, invariably, victims succumb to this disease only after being arrested or notified of an impending arrest for corruption or other high crimes. [I am not implying that the people named in the article were not sick. Their doctors have said they were sick, and I am not a doctor to diagnose them from afar or near.]

2. Adhi Rajaram

We are not sure who the very first patient of this unnamed disease is. Digging into news archives, we come across the case of an All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) district secretary, Mr. Adhi Rajaram, in 1995. He was an accused in the criminal assault of a lawyer named K. M. Vijayan. This lawyer was attacked by some men in front of his house, as he was leaving to catch a plane to New Delhi to argue a case before the Indian Supreme Court challenging a state law enacted by the AIADMK

government of the then chief minister Ms. Jayalalithaa Jayaram. Dissatisfied with the state police investigation, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which comes under the purview of the Indian Central Government, to take over the investigation. An arrest warrant for Adhi Rajaram was issued as a result of the CBI investigation.

As soon as the arrest warrant was issued, the 38 year old Rajaram complained of feeling sick and was rushed to the state government hospital in Chennai. (But for this sudden illness he would have been taken to jail.) He was diagnosed with a heart condition. The attending physician told the court that it was a "subjective condition" that cannot be evaluated by any diagnostic instrument. At this, the judge quipped, "then, any one could claim to be suffering from this sickness!"

3. T.T.V. Bhaskaran

Another case of the disease was also reported in the same year. This time it was the managing director of a Tamil cable television company called JJTV (named after the then chief minister Jayalalitha Jeyaram). The 31 year old T.T.V. Bhaskaran is a nephew of Mrs. Sasikala Natarajan, a very close friend of the chief minister. She, in fact, lives with the chief minister in the latter's residence.

Bhaskaran was charged with foreign exchange violations by the Enforcement Directorate (this department also comes under the purview of the central government). After his arrest, just before he was to be sent to his prison cell, he complained of chest pain and was rushed to the state government hospital in Chennai. He was accommodated in an air-conditioned room (a far cry from the prison cell he would have gone to, but for this unfortunate illness). Television and video cassette players were installed in the room so that he could view taped JJTV programs. A cellular phone was also supplied for his use. He allegedly conducted business through the phone. He also had a steady stream of visitors. However, when the Enforcement Directorate officials wanted to talk to him, the government hospital doctors prohibited it on the grounds that he was too sick for that. The directorate went to courts and a judge ordered that Bhaskaran be made available for an interview with directorate officials in the presence of a physician. When the officials went to the hospital on the set date, they were told that Bhaskaran's condition worsened and that he was transferred to the Intensive Coronary Care Unit. Doctors would allow only a very short interview. The frustrated officials left the patient after about 5 minutes of interview.

4. Sasikala Natarajan

The most recent case of this mystery sickness is that of Mrs. Sasikala Natarajan, whose name has already come up in this article. She was arrested on January 2, 1996 on charges of having wealth well beyond her known sources of income. She got sick in the jail and was admitted to the hospital, first to the Chennai government hospital and then to the ultra-modern and expensive Apollo Hospital in Chennai. When in the hospital, she got bail. Soon she recovered and was released from the hospital.

In June 1997 she failed to come to the court claiming to be sick. Her lawyers told the judge that she could not walk. Judge ordered that she be present in court on the next trial date. So she came to the court building, on June 25 and on July 17, in an ambulance, and was brought before the judge in a stretcher with two nurses walking by the stretcher holding glucose bottles feeding her intravenously. On July 17, when the judge asked her if she knew that he was a judge, she was too sick to answer. At this, the judge ordered that she should present herself to the government hospital on July 21 for a medical examination by the hospital doctors. Her lawyers protested and assured the judge that she will definitely walk to the court next time. **(How do these lawyers know that this lady, too sick even to talk, would be able to walk next time?)** On hearing the judge's order to go to the government hospital for an examination, Sasikala was able to gather enough strength to utter "I understand" in answer to the judge's earlier question. The judge would not withdraw his order.

Sasikala was examined at the government hospital in Chennai by a team of physicians and they declared her to be fully healthy physically and mentally and stated that she was able to answer their questions without any difficulty. [It should be noted that there was a new State Government by now in Tamil Nadu under Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi, an archrival of former Chief Minister and Mrs. Sasikala's friend Jayalalithaa. The government hospital in Chennai comes under the purview of the state government.]

Nowadays the stretcher is gone but she comes to the court building in an ambulance and then goes into the building in a wheel chair. She, no longer, has any problem answering to questions.

This strange disease does not seem to be communicable. She is living in Jayalalitha's house and neither the former chief minister nor her household employees have come up with this mystery illness.

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5. **A Strange Disease Spreads from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka** (Political Humour and Satire)

Inia Pandian

[First Published: June 2002]

[I am not implying that the people named in the article were not sick. Their doctors have said they were sick, and I am not a doctor to diagnose them from afar or near.]

We reported a strange disease in Tamil Nadu in 1997 in the previous chapter. There were a few more attacks of that strange disease in the capital city Chennai after the publication of that article but then it disappeared without a trace.

A news item on February 20, 2002 in a Sri Lankan publication startled this writer because a very similar disease was reported in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo. Did the disease pass though the narrow Palk Straits between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka and then travel south to Colombo, or did it spread via a Chennai-Colombo flight?

According to reports, General Anuruddha Ratwatte, the former Deputy Defense Minister and uncle to President Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunge, was arrested on charges of conspiracy to murder, conspiracy to cause hurt to members of rival political party and aiding and abetting army personnel identified as having massacred ten Muslim youths. The judge remanded him and ordered that he be held in Welikada prison in Colombo until March 4, 2002. But General Anuruddha Ratwatte pleaded ill and booked himself into a Colombo hospital for high blood pressure.

General Anuruddha Ratwatte was not the only one to catch this strange disease in Sri Lanka. His two sons (President Chandrika Kumaratunge's cousins) Lohan Ratwatte and Chanuka Ratwatte were also struck by this disease. These two were also facing criminal charges. Police could not locate them for a while. Finally they were arrested after six weeks. Soon they felt sick with chest pain. So instead of sending them to a prison cell, they were admitted to the prison hospital.

Ajantha Zoysa, a member of parliament and a family friend of President Chandrika Kumaratunge, arrested in connection with a plot against a minister from another political party, also fell ill and admitted to hospital. He complained that he was suffering chest pain.

Nihal Karunaratne, Director of Presidential Security Division (President Chandrika Kumaratunga's bodyguards), was also hospitalized just before he was arrested in connection with a plot to kill a President's political opponent.

There were a few more cases of this disease soon after their arrest. One commonality between these cases I know of is that they are all connected to President Mrs. Chandrika

Kumaratunge in one way or other. Read the previous chapter and see for yourself the similarities between the disease that felled powerful Tamil Nadu politicians and their friends/relatives in the 1990s and the cases in Sri Lanka. There most of those who fell victim to a similar disease were connected to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalithaa Jeyaram.

This seems to be the same disease that "terrified" some of the high and mighty in Tamil Nadu capital Chennai. The epidemiological pattern as to whom this disease strikes and some of the "symptoms" and "cures" are all very similar.

Like in Tamil Nadu, this illness has struck only the rich and the politically powerful. Thank heavens that poor people did not catch this dreaded disease because it requires not only long hospital stays but also luxury conditions in the hospital. Something only the very rich or politically connected could get.

Like in Tamil Nadu, the Sri Lankan politicians, family and associates were struck by this mystery disease only when they were arrested or were about to be arrested. I suppose something about police officers slapping the handcuffs or the thought of it triggers the disease.

The treatment given in Sri Lanka also seems very similar to that given in Tamil Nadu. Long hospital stays under luxury conditions. The former Deputy Defense Minister and his two sons did have luxurious hospital accommodations. A foreign newspaper's headline read, "Ratwatte's detained sons lead life of luxury in hospital".

Given the strikingly similar nature of the disease in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, we may venture some guess as to when they would recover from this disease. In Tamil Nadu most of these patients recovered:

- 1) When they got bail or when there was no longer a need to spend time in a prison cell, or
- 2) When the court ordered an independent panel of doctors to examine the patient and report the findings to the court. As we discussed in Reference 1, the independent panel of doctors was unable to find anything physically wrong with that patient in Tamil Nadu.

In spite of the seeming seriousness of the illness warranting long hospital stays, it is never fatal nor does it have any long-term effects. As far as we know, the politicians and their friends who fell ill in Tamil Nadu are now as healthy as a horse. So, our prognosis is that President's uncle, her two cousins, her chief bodyguard and the other politicians are in no danger.

[This writer is a Tamil from Tamil Nadu, and is happy to see that some Sinhala politicians of Sri Lanka seem to be learning from Tamil Nadu politicians. But I hope that they would learn the best from Tamil Nadu, not the worst!]

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6.

Rajiv Gandhi-Karunanidhi Duel of Words in 1991 and Rahul Gandhi-Stalin Exchange of Words in 2018

A. Muthuraman and Thanjai Nalankilli

First Published: May 2001; Updated: October 2018]

Abbreviation

DMK - Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Party)

1. Rajiv Gandhi - Karunanidhi Duel of Words (1991) (by A. Muthuraman)

There was an interesting duel of words between former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (of Congress party) and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi (of DMK party) during the 1991 election campaign. Rajiv Gandhi took a dig at Karunanidhi at a Congress election rally in Tamil Nadu. He asked sarcastically, "Why are you hiding behind those dark glasses, Mr. Karunanidhi?" (referring to the sunglasses Karunanidhi often wears). Reply came at the next DMK campaign rally. Karunanidhi is a renowned orator and writer with a sharp tongue when need be. Karunanidhi shot back, "Yes, I do wear dark glasses but I am not a coward like Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to wear a bullet proof vest!" Unfortunately, when the end came for Rajiv Gandhi, the bulletproof vest did not save him from the explosive that the woman suicide bomber wore around her belly.

2. Rahul Gandhi - MK Stalin Exchange of Words in 2018 (by Thanjai Nalankilli)

Twenty-seven years later, in August 2018, Karunanidhi's son Stalin and Rajiv Gandhi's son Rahul Gandhi exchanged some friendly but interesting words worthy of note.

DMK President M. Karunanidhi chose his son MK Stalin as his political heir. As Stalin assumed more and more power within the party, this writer had some concern about Stalin's commitment to Tamil. However, as he assumed more and more responsibilities, Stalin did start talking about opposition to Hindi imposition and protection of Tamil language and culture. I view the following twitter exchange between Rahul Gandhi and MK Stalin from that perspective.

Hindi politicians and, more importantly the Indian government, put the prefix "Shri" in front of male names even in English correspondence. We would have no complaint if they used "Shri" in Hindi correspondence; they should use "Mr" in English correspondence. I, as a Tamil, do not want me addressed as Shri.

Unlike in 1991, Congress Party and DMK were political allies in 2018. On August 28, 2018 Rahul Gandhi addressed M. K. Stalin as Shri MK Stalin in a twitter message congratulating MK Stalin on being elected President of DMK. In his twitter message

thanking Rahul Gandhi, Stalin addressed Rahul as Thiru Rahul Gandhi. (Thiru is the Tamil equivalent of Shri). Stalin had made his point.

We are pleased that Stalin has Tamil in his heart. As long as Tamil is in his heart and deeds, we will stand with Stalin.

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7. Shadow Wars on the Silver Screen

Inia Pandian

[First Published: March 2002]

Definition:

Dravida Nadu: The four southern states of India, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are collectively called by some as Dravida Nadu because this region is predominantly occupied by Dravidian peoples.

Abbreviation

DMK - Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (a political party in Tamil Nadu)

Movie stars are the most recognizable and popular faces in any country. Political parties often seek their support and endorsement during elections to cash in on their popular appeal. Sometimes movie stars themselves enter the political arena and contest elections. Tamil Nadu has more of a movie industry intrusion into politics than any other country.

Chief Minister C. N. Annadurai was a well-known screenplay writer. Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi (MK) was also a popular screenplay writer (he is said to have authored more screenplays than anyone in the world). Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) was the most beloved movie actor of all time in Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa was a popular movie actress who often co-starred with M. G. Ramachandran, among others. Some others from the movie industry held lesser elected-positions, for example, S. S. Rajendran (actor), Vijayanthimala (actress) and R. Veerappan (producer). Others entered politics but failed in the election arena, for example, Sivaji Ganesan (a well respected and popular actor).

With so much interaction between the movie industry and politics, it is to be expected that politics will seep into movies (cinemas). Two political greats with movie-industry connections used **innuendos and sarcasms to insult** each other on the silver screen. One is M. Karunanidhi, the popular screenplay writer; the other was late M. G. Ramachandran, the matinee idol. Though the latter did not write movie scripts, he had enough clout to get a few choice lines added to the dialog. Once close friends, they turned enemies in the early 1970s and became bitter political rivals.

M. Karunanidhi received an honorary doctorate degree from a Tamil Nadu university soon after he became Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. He also uses the title "Kalaigarnar" (respected artist) given to him by party faithfuls many years ago. In fact, he is simply referred to as "Doctor Kalaigarnar" in DMK publicity materials. M. G. Ramachandran took a shot at this in one of his movies. His character says in the movie, "It counts only if

someone else gives you a title, not if you give it to yourself". A direct hit at his political rival. (By the way, Ramachandran himself received an honorary doctorate from a Tamil Nadu university soon after he became the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister a few years later.)

M. G. Ramachandran was well versed in all types of fights, from sword fight to silampam (a popular fight using sticks; the stick could be deadly in the hands of a silambam expert.) Many of his movies in his early years were full of sword fights and silampam, and in fact, he rose to stardom because of these fight scenes in such movies as Malai Kallan, Madurai Veeran, Chakravarthi Thirumagal and Thaiku pin Tharam. M. Karunanidhi mocked at this in a movie script. A monkey-trainer puts on a street show in which his little monkey runs around swinging a stick, an obvious imitation of Ramachandran's silambam scenes in movies. Moviegoers had no problem understanding the insult at Ramachandran.

Such indirect insults at political rivals escape censor board scissors but the Indian Government controlled censor board would not allow any statement of Tamil nationalist sentiments. Back in the 1950s a popular movie song was "Engal Dravida Pon Naadae..." (Our Golden Dravida Nadu...) written by a DMK songwriter Kavignar Kannadasan. Though it escaped the censor board because it did not call for the independence of Dravida Nadu from India, a position held by Kannadasan and the DMK at that time, the Indian-Government controlled monopoly **All India Radio** never ever played this song praising Dravida Nadu, while it played every song ever written in praise of Bharat Matha (Mother India).

Since the censor board would not allow any Tamil nationalist sentiments in the dialog, writers resorted to "indirect means". In a 1967 movie, M. G. Ramachandran, a leading member of DMK at that time, played the role of a prince fighting the enemies of his country. When his army wins a battle and he hoists his country's flag atop the fort, he would shout "Vazhga Nadu" (Victory to the Country). This shout appears, may be, a dozen times in the movie. He never names the country. What he really wanted to say was "Vazhga Dravida Nadu" (Victory to Dravida Nadu) but such a line would surely be cut out by the Indian censor board. Tamil people watching the movie knew that Ramachandran was actually shouting "Vazhga Dravida Nadu". They would whistle and clap as Ramachandran shouts "Vazhga Nadu" hearing in their hearts "Vazhga Dravida Nadu".

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8. Out-of-State Actresses in Tamil Movies

A. Rajagopal

[First Published: March 2003]

Tamil movies have seldom been more than a source of light entertainment for the masses. After days of hard work and the harsh realities of life, men and women treat themselves to a movie to spend couple of hours "living" in a fantasy world of songs and dances, pretty women, handsome men, palatial houses and fancy clothes. There is nothing wrong with that. But the Tamil movie industry has gone to the gutters in recent years. Many movies have become a vehicle for showing female flesh and nothing more. How else can you explain the recent trend of "importing" North Indian actresses who know no Tamil! Many of these ladies move their pretty lips and Tamil dialog read by someone else is dubbed. Acting is not just prancing around half-naked and displaying as much female flesh as censors would allow. An actor/actress should display emotions as they speak. How can an actress show proper emotions when she does not know the meaning of the words dubbed?

Main attractions of these movies are the dance numbers. Today's dances in Tamil movies look more like aerobic exercises than fine art. Watch the dance numbers by past actresses like Padmini or Vyjayanthimala. They are trained classical dancers. Even when they danced to "non-classical" love duets, there was an art form, finesse to their dances. Most of today's dances in movies are nothing more than gyrating the hips to accentuate and display certain parts of the female anatomy clad in tight and/or transparent clothing.

[NOTE: I want to make it clear that these movie producers are not doing anything illegal but we wish they would use actors and actresses who can speak and understand Tamil. Out-of-state actors/actresses should first learn Tamil before they are given Tamil movie roles. A few out-of-state actresses do learn Tamil and we appreciate it.]

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9. No Sari, No Idli : South Indians Go to Hell!

Sharada T.P.K.

[First Published: July 2007; Updated: January 2016]

OUTLINE

FOREWORD

1. Indian Airlines Eliminates Saris from its Dress Code
2. Indian Railways Eliminates Idli-Dosai from its Menu
3. Additional Information
4. Related Information
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Foreword

This article is different from the other articles in this book. The sari-idli matter is not on the lighter side of life in Tamil Nadu. It is a sad side of life in Tamil Nadu. Indian government is attempting to eliminate South Indian cultural traditions from Indian government-owned institutions operating in South India. Is there an end to Indian government attempts to eradicate the cultures and traditions of South India and Hindi-fy South India?

1. Indian Airlines Eliminates Saris from its Dress Code

In September 2006 Indian Government owned Indian Airlines Chairman Vishvapathi Tripathi announced that all airline hostesses would be asked to wear suridar-salwar instead of sarees. (Although women all over India wear sarees and surida-salwar nowadays, suridar-salwar is traditionally worn in northern India while sarees are south Indian tradition). Then, after some disgruntlement from southern politicians, Indian Airlines quietly backed off in May 2007 saying that it is just going to change the colour of the saris from green to orange and blue. Had south Indians not been alert and raised their voice against it, saris would have gone out from Indian Airlines. [Note: Recently Indian Airlines and Air India merged together and is called Air India. Saris will continue to be used.]

2. Indian Railways Eliminates Idli-Dosai from its Menu

In early 2007 Indian Government owned Indian Railways eliminated almost all south Indian dishes from the food served to passengers (even to passengers traveling within southern states). Even the popular idli and dosai were gone. This resulted in much grunting and complaints from the south. Indian Railways and its caterer Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) issued a statement in April 2007 that it was only trying out the new menu on a trial basis for a few months and south Indian food

would be back soon. Why was it eliminating popular southern foods from the menu on a trial basis while north Indian poori, paratha and other foods are still there? Why was it trying out removing south Indian dishes?

Actually the initial notice to regional managers did not say the removal was temporary. It said that the menu is overhauled to make it passenger friendly. Removing south Indian food may be "passenger friendly" to north Indian passengers, but definitely not to southern passengers. May be "passengers" mean "north Indian passengers" to Indian Railways and its caterer Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC)?

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Idli and dosai are two popular dishes in south India. Idli is a steamed rice and lentil cake; often served with spicy sides like chutney, sambar or chili powder-oil. Dosai is a rice and lentil dough crepe; often served with spicy sides like chutney or sambar. Sometimes it is stuffed with spiced potato or onion. Non-Tamils often spell and pronounce dosai as dosa. The correct Tamil pronunciation and spelling are thosai.]

3. Additional Information

(added in October 2012)

Huffington Post is a popular news website in America. It published the Top-Ten Dishes from around the world ("ten foods to try before you die") in 2012. Included in that list is South India's masala dosai. This is the only dish from the Indian Subcontinent in that list. It is this world-acclaimed masala dosai that the Indian Railways removed from its catering in 2007 (brought back after protest). It is not the taste or popularity of dish but whether it is from north India seem to be the criteria for the north-centered Indian government. South seems to get the short end of the stick in everything from language to cultural programs and movies on TV, to dishes served on trains.

4. Related Information

(added in January 2016)

Indian railways, operated by the Indian government, created a website www.coms.indianrailways.gov.in where people can file complaints; you can file complaints in English or Hindi only (visited the website in March 2015). So if my uncle, who does not know English or Hindi, will not be able to file a complaint if necessary.

5. FEEDBACK

(added by Thanjai Nalankill in July 2007)

The events Ms. Sharada cites clearly show Indian Government attempts to remove south Indian cultural identities from everything it controls. It is a concerted, steady process, which in a couple of hundred years would totally eliminate non-Hindi cultural identities from India, and Hindi-fy entire India.

I also want to make another point here. Some Indian apologists may say, "Once south Indians protested, sari and idli-dosai have been brought back. So what is the problem?"

The problem is this. **Why are south Indians at the receiving end all the time when it comes to the Indian government?** We thought Indian government represents all the peoples of this "Indian Union". South Indian food, dress, language and other cultural identities are systematically sidelined. Watched Indian government owned Doordharshan Television recently? How many programs are in Hindi and how many in other Indian languages? Why are south Indian festivals and other cultural events virtually blacked out in Doordharsan?

Why should south Indians have to be ever vigilant to make sure that southern icons like sari, idli and dosai are not eliminated? Why is Indian government keen on eliminating southern cultural symbols from everything it operates? Are South Indians Indian citizens or not?

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